

Appl. No. 09/625,982
Amendment dated May 27, 2004
Reply to Office Action of February 27, 2004

IN THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claim 1 (Original): An online service providing system, comprising:

a terminal equipment of a user requesting a service;

a computer installed at each of a plurality of service points offering services;

and

a distributor device intervening via a network between the terminal equipment and the computers to pass the service request from the terminal equipment to one of the computers, wherein the distributor device includes:

first storage means for storing information regarding each user;

second storage means for storing a service time zone of each service point;

means for referring to, when a service request is received from a user, the first storage means and for determining whether or not the user is authorized to receive a service offered;

means for referring to the second storage means and for selecting one of the service points currently in the service time zone when the user is authorized; and

means for relaying communication between the terminal equipment and the service point selected.

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Claim 2 (Original): An online service providing system according to claim 1, wherein the service time zones of a plurality of service points allow a 24-hour continuous service.

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): An online service providing system according to claim 1, wherein:

the first storage means stores a call identifier of each user associated with the terminal equipment; and

the distributor device determines, when receiving a call from the terminal equipment, whether or not a call identifier received from the terminal equipment, via a network, is beforehand-registered in advance at the first storage means, and uses a result of the determination as one condition for determining an access authorization level of the user.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): An online service providing system according to claim 1, wherein: when a service time zone of a first service point directly succeeds a service time zone of a second service point, the first service point transfers data updated ~~by the first service point~~ to the second service point by ~~when the service of the first service point is replaced with the service of the second service point,~~ and also transfers a transaction received ~~by the first service point~~ to the second service point.

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): A distributor device for use with an online service providing system for selecting, when a service request is received from an

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external device, via a first network, one of a plurality of service points offering services and for passing the request thereto, via a second network, the distributor device comprising:

storage means for storing a service time zone of each service point;
means for referring to the storage means and for selecting one of the service points currently in the service time zone; and
means for relaying the service request received from the external device, via the first network, to the service point selected, via the second network.

Claim 6 (Currently Amended): A distributor device ~~for use with an online service providing system~~ according to claim 5, wherein the service time zones of a plurality of service points allow a 24-hour continuous service.

Claim 7 (Original): A distributor device ~~for use with an online service providing system~~ according to claim 5, further including:
second storage means for registering a call identifier; and
means for controlling, when a call identifier ~~of an originator~~ from the terminal equipment of the service request is ~~beforehand~~ registered to in advance at the second storage means, operation of relaying the service request to a service point.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): A distributor device ~~for use with an online service providing system~~ according to claim 5, wherein the storage means stores a service time zone and a service type of each service point, ~~the device further including and wherein~~ means for referring provided to refer to the storage means

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~~and~~for selecting one of the service points which matches in a service type with the service request and which is currently in the service time zone.

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): A ~~storage~~computer readable medium for ~~storing~~having stored thereon a program which, ~~wherein the program instructs a~~
~~computer to execute functions including~~when executed by a computer system, cause
the computer system to:

~~a function to~~ receive a service request from an external device;

~~a function to~~ refer to a storage means~~section~~ storing a service time zone of each of a plurality of service points offering services and to select one of service points currently in a service time zone; and

~~a function to~~ send the service request to the service point selected.

Claim 10 (Currently Amended): A ~~storage~~computer readable medium for ~~storing a program~~ according to claim 9, wherein:

~~the storage means~~the storage section stores a service time zone and a service type of each service point; and

~~the program further causes the computer system~~ includes a function to refer to the ~~storage means~~section to select one of the service points which matches in a service type with the service request and which is currently in the service time zone.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): A service providing method in which when a service request is received from an external device, via a first network, one of a plurality of service points offering services is selected and the service request is

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transferred to the service point selected, via a second network, comprising the steps of:

storing a service time zone of each service point in storage means;
referring to the storage means and selecting one of service points currently in a service time zone; and
relaying the service request received from the external device, via the first network, to the service point selected, via the second network.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): ServiceA service providing method according to claim 11, further comprising the step of

storing a call identifier in storage means,
wherein the service request is relayed to a service point when a call identifier of an originator of the service request is beforehand-registered tein advance at the storage means.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): A service providing method in which when a service request is received from a terminal equipment, via a first network, the service request is transferred to a service point offering services, via a second network, the service providing method comprising the steps of:

storing, in storage means, a call identifier of each user associated with the terminal equipment and a service type available for the user with a correspondence established therebetween;

determining the service type according to a call identifier received in association with a service request from the terminal equipment; and

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relaying the service request to a service point associated with the service type.

Claim 14 (New): An online service providing system, comprising:

- a terminal equipment of a user requesting a service;
- a plurality of service points offering services, each service point having a computer installed therein; and
- a distributor device connected to the terminal equipment, via a first network, and connected to the plurality of service points, via a second network, to pass the service request from the terminal equipment to one of the plurality of services points, the distributor device comprising:
 - a first database for storing information on each user and service type that each user registered to use;
 - a second database for storing information on each service point and service type that each service point provides;
 - first means for referring to, when a service request is received from a user, the first database to determine whether the user is authorized to receive the service requested;
 - second means for referring to the second database to select one of the service points that is corresponding to the requested service and available when the user is authorized; and
 - relay means for relaying communication between the terminal equipment and the service point selected.

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Claim 15 (New): An online service providing system according to claim 14, wherein:

the first database stores a call identifier of each user associated with the terminal equipment,

the second database stores a business hour of each service point as the operation information;

the first means determines, when receiving a call from the terminal equipment, whether or not a call identifier received from the terminal equipment, via the first network, is registered in advance at the first database, and further determines, when receiving a request from the terminal equipment, whether the requested service type is registered in advance at the first database; and

the second means selects available one of the service points providing the requested service by referring to the business hour of each service point stored in the second database.

Claim 16 (New): An online service providing system according to claim 14, wherein the first network corresponds to a switching network, such as a public phone network, a portable phone network, or an ISDN network, and the second network corresponds to the Internet.

Claim 17 (New): An online service providing system according to claim 14, wherein the distributor device further includes a service point operation status table for storing indicators which indicate whether each service point is operable, and means for periodically conducting a health check of the computer of

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each service point and updating the service point operation status table according to a result of the health check.

Claim 18 (New): An online service providing system according to claim 14, wherein the first database stores at least a call identifier assigned to the terminal equipment that is received from the terminal equipment, via the first network; a user identifier assigned to identify a user, and a registration flag used to indicate whether the call identifier has already registered in advance for automatic distribution service.

Claim 19 (New): A service providing method according to claim 11, wherein the first network corresponds to a switching network, such as a public phone network, a portable phone network, or an ISDN network, and the second network corresponds to the Internet.

Claim 20 (New): A service providing method according to claim 13, wherein the first network corresponds to a switching network, such as a public phone network, a portable phone network, or an ISDN network, and the second network corresponds to the Internet.